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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7143
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1713
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0877
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4750
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4437
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7968
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5529
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 0107
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1335
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1363
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0202
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUCLRFA/USDA WASHDC
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000094

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, G/AIAG
PACOM FOR FPA
USDA FOR FAS/PECAD, FAS/CNMP, FAS/AAD, APHIS;
BANGKOK FOR USAID: JMACARTHUR, APHIS:NCARDENAS, REO:JWALLER

E.O. 12958:N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [SENV](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BIO](#) [KFLU](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: GOB SEEKS TO STRENGTHEN AVIAN INFLUENZA PROGRAM

REF: A) 07 Rangoon 1180 B) 07 Rangoon 738

RANGOON 00000094 001.2 OF 002

11. (SBU) Summary. Responding to repeated outbreaks among poultry in Burma, the Burmese Government has dramatically strengthened its avian influenza (AI) response program during the past two years, culminating in the successful rapid detection and response to Burma's first human AI case in December. In 2008, both the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) plan to improve AI response capacity through continued training of staff on early detection and rapid response, public outreach to educate farmers on the dangers of AI, and coordinating with regional governments to share information about AI cases. In late February, the Ministry of Health will inaugurate a new National Influenza Center in Rangoon. Working with the WHO and FAO, LBVD and the MOH will also address long-term projects, including updating the National Avian Influenza Response Plan, establishing a monitoring and evaluation framework to access gaps, developing biosecurity measures at live bird markets, improving surveillance and early detection in rural areas, and addressing ways to develop a comprehensive compensation program. End Summary.

Improving AI Response

12. (SBU) During the visit of USAID/RDMA Health Official Dr. John MacArthur, we met with officials from the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, LBVD, and the Ministry of Health to discuss Burma's progress in responding to avian influenza outbreaks. According to Dr. MacArthur, Burma made great strides in improving AI response since the first outbreak in March 2006. FAO Country Representative Tang Zhengping acknowledged the improvement,

noting that GOB officials identified areas for improvement with each AI outbreak and adjusted their detection and response plans accordingly. The most recent poultry outbreaks in Eastern Shan State in November–December were an example of excellent coordination between LBVD and the MOH, resulting in the early detection and treatment of Burma's first human case (Ref A). There is still room to develop and improve, LBVD Deputy Director General Dr. Than Tun recognized. With continued donor assistance, including funding from USAID and partnerships with the WHO and FAO, GOB agencies will continue to develop a more comprehensive AI response plan.

13. (SBU) During the past two years, LBVD recognized and reacted to the need for improved AI response by training surveillance and response teams situated throughout the country. Currently, LBVD employs several hundred field veterinarians in 300 townships who survey 20,000 farms and backyard poultry, as well as wild bird habitats, for AI cases. LBVD officials work closely with farmers to ensure the reporting of any irregular poultry deaths. Local LBVD and MOH teams can then respond immediately, culling poultry, establishing quarantine areas, and monitoring both animal and human health for future outbreaks.

14. (SBU) In addition to early detection and response, the Burmese Government, working with WHO, FAO, and UNICEF, have educated more than 14,500 farmers, veterinarians, health officials, and local officials on the dangers of AI and the need for early detection. More than 2,500 farmers, after receiving training on biosecurity measures, have implemented proper procedures to prevent the spread of AI. Targeting the supply chain is important to preventing the spread of the disease, Dr. Than Tun emphasized.

15. (SBU) In recent months, LBVD took steps to improve surveillance, collecting serum and swab samples from ducks in Mon State, Rangoon Division, Mandalay Division, and Sagaing Division. By identifying sero-positive ducks, which are often carriers of H5N1, LBVD can

RANGOON 00000094 002.2 OF 002

better monitor these areas for possible future outbreaks and encourage farmers to move quickly to kill the ducks before they infect other birds. While LBVD has identified sero-positive ducks in 15 out of 80 villages, Dr. Than Tun admitted that these ducks might not infect other poultry with AI. LBVD is ready for another outbreak, he said, recognizing that Burma is now entering peak AI period.

Looking Toward the Future

16. (SBU) WHO and FAO officials acknowledged that the GOB still has work to do to strengthen its AI program. The National Avian Influenza Response Plan should be updated to incorporate best practices and lessons learned, Tang told us. WHO and FAO will work with the GOB agencies to establish a monitoring and evaluation framework, which will enhance the monitoring of donor activities, evaluate ongoing programs, and assist in identifying and addressing gaps in the current program. This project is a long-term one, but will assist the Burmese Government in identifying areas for improvement, Dr. MacArthur said. The GOB agencies will also continue coordinating with neighboring countries to share information about AI outbreaks.

17. (SBU) Dr. Than Tun agreed with the need to address gaps, including the need to work with wet markets in Rangoon to improve their biosecurity measures. In 2008, LBVD and FAO plan to work with the Yangon City Development Council (YCDC) to restructure the large live bird and wet markets in Rangoon. Currently, more than 40,000 live birds move in and out of the Rangoon markets daily, with many culled onsite. Establishing a separate culling facility is important to preventing human infections, Tang told us.

18. (SBU) Additionally, the GOB will work to update labs and train technicians so they can more quickly identify new H5N1 cases. The MOH, with the assistance of the WHO, will inaugurate its new National Influenza Center in Rangoon in late February. LBVD must do the same with their Animal Health Laboratory, Dr. Than Tun said. LBVD officials also addressed the need for a comprehensive

compensation policy to ensure that farmers report quickly any possible AI outbreaks (Ref B), but acknowledged that the lack of funding from the government precludes implementation. The GOB often compensates farmers in-kind, with either cell phones, low-cost loans, or day-old chicks. The real problem, Dr. Than Tun continued, is that "backyard farmers" try to hide their chickens to prevent LBVD from culling them. LBVD must work with local farmers to control the market chain, he said.

Comment

19. (SBU) GOB agencies remain committed to improving their ability to respond to AI outbreaks and prevent the spread of the disease, which was demonstrated again during the GOB's response to the first human AI case in December. The Burmese have come far in the past two years and have shown a willingness to work with, share information, and openly discuss AI issues with us. Despite their success, they are their own worst critics. Their honest assessment of their capabilities shows a real understanding of the importance of preventing AI outbreaks and the need to work with neighboring countries to prevent a regional pandemic. We should continue to work with LBVD and MOH to strengthen their capabilities on this disease, which knows no borders.

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